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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a history and description of an introductory college level survey course on the future. The objective of the course is to help students recognize the importance of considering the future in every category of learning. A new futures study curriculum at Metropolitan State University, St. Paul, Minnesota, was introduced in 1975. Initial steps included developing a course outline, convincing university officials that a future study course was necessary and desirable, and circulating brochures announcing the course to the public. Course design stressed involvement of guest lectures; discussions led by local volunteers; participation by the teacher as facilitator rather than a depository of knowledge; and extensive use of a wide variety of teaching methods involving reading material, films, field trips, and projects. Topics covered in the course since 1975 include "Techno-Futures and the Individual:" "Implications of Religious Messages;" "Transportation: Present and Future;" "Legal Utopias in a Changing World;" "Educational Futures; "Sharing Global Resources;" "Genetic Engineering and the Future·" and "Communication Media of the Future." Feedback from students was encouraged and course topics and activities were tailored to student interests. Expectations of course developers are that the course will continue to evolve and attract a wide variety of students. (DB)

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A Metro Network for Educational Futures: State of the Process

by

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Paper presented at the Second Conference of the Education Division of the World Future Society, Minneapolis, 1979.

SO 012 463

A Metro Network for Educational Futures: State of the Process*

...Berenice D. Bleedorn, Metropolitan State University, St. Paul, MN

Introduction

The study of the future is gathering momentum. In addition, it promises to become a vehicle for bringing academia and the community together into a mutuality of shared participation and problem solving. Because increasing numbers of College and University teachers are looking for ways of designing and proposing courses in Futures Studies, this history and description of an overview course successfully launched at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul is presented, with the hope that ideas and directions for other places might evolve. What is the key to a beginning for Futures Studies? Quite simply, develop a support group. Make a plan. Present it with evidence of student support for the course. Begin modestly. Work hard and wait for approval to grow. In the case of the introductory course described here, the idea has gained University approval to the extent that a plan is under way for the development of an entire Futures Studies cluster of courses. Opportunities for study in specialized areas related to the future have been announced. This paper is a reminder that a beginning, however modest, is worth the effort. As the concept of studying the future grows in familiarity, as media realizes and capitalizes on the dynamic nature of its public appeal, as students recognize the importance of the futurizing process in every category of learning, the growth of Futures Studies is virtually assured.

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* Paper presented at the Second Conference of the Education Division of the World Future Society, Minneapolis, 1979.

THE CREATION AND GROWTH OF FUTURES STUDIES FOR A UNIVERSITY AND BEYOND

Berenice Bahr Bleedorn
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Community Faculty, Metropolitan State University

The introduction of a course on Futures Studies to a college curriculum can be a challenging project. It can also result in a unique integration of schools and general public in a stimulating learning experience.

The Futures Studies course at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul is an example of such an experiment. The process by which the experiment has evolved successfully is reflected in Loren Eiseley's statement on Creativity.

> The process (Creativity) itself contains the elements of indeterminacy and contingency. Only by establishing an open-ended society and a flexible imagination that can accommodate the unpredictable will we have done our necessary part.[1].

Those qualities of flexibility, imagination, and a risking of the unpredictable characterized the process reported here. My approach in this description is largely anecdotal. My observations are based on my personal perspectives as originator and instructor in the learning experience.

The Setting

A note on the character of Metropolitan State University is in order here. An alternative in Higher Education, Metro U. provides opportunities for individualistic, self-directed, quality, lifetime learning. It is a fully accredited, Upper Division, degree-granting institution. Assessment of learning is competence-based. Transcripts are narrative. There is no formal campus. A

Coordinating Center in Metro Square in St. Paul, staffed by more than twenty permanent staff members, provides organization services and leadership for the University and its more than two thousand students. Metro U. depends upon the services of approximately two hundred fifty Community Faculty members to provide Group Learning Opportunities (GLO's) as one of the diverse learning strategies available for its students.

Futures Studies: An Overview is in its fourth year. Much of the course is the same as when it began in 1975. Much is changing. Its future is unpredictable. It is hoped that an account of its history can suggest possibilities for other places. This report emphasized the process of introducing the course and the featured public lecture series, since these are its two most distinctive properties.

The course is described presently in the Metropolitan State University Catalogue as follows:

> Futures Studies: An Overview. Berenice Bleedorn. Students focus on trends and alternatives for the future in a rapidly changing world. An interdisciplinary perspective is a major emphasis. Guest lecturers, readings, discussions, films, participation in futuristic thinking strategies and games, and field trips provide students with knowledge of the fundamental concepts, relationships, and implications related to Futures Studies. Evaluations are based on a student journal, a take-home essay examination, and a project developed in an area of the student's personal interest. The basic text is Toffler's The Futurist. It is supplemented by readings from a bibliography and materials distributed in class. In addition, students are encouraged to discover relevant readings of individual interest and up-dated significance. The raising of public consciousness and the development of leadership concerned with the future of society are predicted outcomes of the course.[2]

From the Beginning

Back in 1975, the process of introducing a new curriculum offering dealing with the future had its share of roadblocks. Concepts involved and the proposed design of the course were relatively unfamiliar to most University committees. No existing courses of a like model were available to add credibility to the idea. It became clear that a team effort was needed. The following is the chronology that succeeded. It is part of a report provided upon request by the University committee at the end of the first experimental Quarter.

1. In a brainstorming session in my Creative Problem Solving class, the idea to have Metro University staff and students plan a course together was raised.

2. Since I had a personal interest in the study of the future, I tested the level of interest and awareness of need at Metro U. with a survey in the February issue of the Catalyst, a student/faculty newsletter.

3. A meeting of responders was called in March. A group of eleven volunteers was formed to write a course description and proposal. The group included two additional Community Faculty members, a member of Metro Alumni, and seven students.

4. A series of meetings in spring produced general consensus on content and format; I put the ideas into a proposal and submitted it to Metro U.'s Liberal Arts Conference for approval.

5. In July we negotiated with Don Imsland of Northern States Power Futures Studies Department for space for our sessions and for use of materials and equipment.

6. Lecturers for special topics were scheduled during July in expectation of approval of the course.

7. In August we had notification that the course had been approved and announced for Wednesday evenings, 6:30 to 9:30, Sept. 24 to Dec. 3.

8. Mary Shea, Metro U. Alumni member who assisted throughout with arrangements and planning, set up the loan of a portable videotape machine for recording lectures.

9. I had brochures printed for circulation to the public, and arranged for coffee to be provided for participants.

10. I prepared a comprehensive bibliography on Futures Studies for distribution and an information sheet for students.

Sessions were held as scheduled. Response from participants was enthusiastic. From 40-60 people, including registered students and general public, attended each session. Evaluations at the close of the series reflected results: "Stimulating subject matter"..appreciated that they were open to the public such as myself"..."great quality and array of speakers"..."great opportunity to meet with people of similar interests"... "appreciate the input and new ideas it has given me"..."enjoyed the multitude of ideas"..."personal contact with speakers, other students, and interested guests much appreciated"....

The Design:

In support of the concept that networks and citizen groups are the key to social change, a major factor in the plan of the course is a focus on the objective of the raising of public consciousness. This is in addition to readings, discussions, films, field trips, projects, and techniques for considering trends and alternatives regarding crucial issues of the future. A new series of lectures and discussions by local volunteer guests is arranged each quarter. Brochures announcing the program are printed and distributed, inviting the public to attend. Publicity is also carried in local newspapers. Classes for registered students meet for ten sessions of three hours each. The five or six public lectures are incorporated into the course content. The mix of registered students and community participants of extremely diversified ages, perspectives, experiences, and opinions results consistently in vigorous and enlightening discussion following guest presentations. Some of the topics covered during the course's history suggest the diversity:

Techno-futures and the Individual (Otto Schmitt, University Professor of Bio-Physics and Bio-Engineering)
Implications of Religious Messages in Future Societal Experiences (Harvey Egan, Catholic Priest)
Educational Futures: Forward to Balance (Berenice Bleedorn, Metro U.)
Sharing Global Resources (Tim Scherkenback, Bread for the World)
Technology: Planning and Managing (Elaine Barber and Kappy Fitzgerald, 3M Corporation Staff)
General Systems (Jerry Allan, Criteria and Arthur Harkins, University of Minn.)
Transportation: Present and Future (David Graven, Metro Council Advisor and Bob Merck, informed citizen)
The Energy Picture: Current and Beyond (Michael Barnes, Minnesota Energy Agency
The Land and Its Stewardship (Chuck Dayton, Sierra Club and David Mills, Land Developer)
Legal Utopias in a Changing World (Toni McNaron, University of Minnesota and James Shannon, Attorney)

Genetic Engineering and the Future (Elizabeth Reed, U. of Minnesota Biologist)
Hard and Soft Technologies for the Future (Earl Joseph, Sperry Univac)
Social Equality: A Life Style for the Future-W. L. Pew, Adlerian Psychiatrist
Global Economic Futures: On Reinventing the Wheel (George Guthrie, Corporate Planning, Soo Line Railroad)
Communication Media of the Future(Leigh Kamman, 3M Consultant and Broadcaster)
Government and Legal Futures (Jerome Hughes, Minnesota State Senator)

Guest lecturers are invited on the basis of scope of information and audience-related style. There is no record of refusals. Guests are scheduled from seven-thirty to nine o'clock P.M. for the public session following an hour of class for registered students. Discussions following the scheduled period habitually extend well beyond predicted closing time.

Since the beginning of the course, the audience has developed a core of regular participants-Metro students and alumni from previous quarters as well as community members and students from other educational institutions, High School and College.

Current Status

Futures Studies: An Overview, Fall Quarter, 1978, is the ninth offering. Twelve to fifteen students is a standard course enrollment. Course requirements are specific. (See Appendix A) Many students are stimulated to produce results well beyond expectations. The series of public sessions continues to be an exciting and rewarding component. Discussions following guest presentations are becoming increasingly vigorous and enlightening.

A graduate of Metro University and a member of the original Task Force is now serving as Associate. Laura Crosby helps to arrange and publicize the lecture series, plan programs and field trips, and evaluate student involvement and contribution. The schedule for Fall Quarter, 1978 is:

October 12: Registered students meet for orientation, introduction of course concepts, rationale, information, and interaction. Introductory films.

October 19: Participation in games and techniques. Tapes from Futures Week at Chautauqua, N. Y., 1978.

October 26: Student discussion of readings. Participation in Futures techniques
7:30 - 9:00 Public Lecture: Predictions and Possibilities in the World of Art
November 2: Student discussion of readings. Group learning activities.
7:30 -9:00 Public Lecture: Coming-Computerized Communication Systems for Inventors and Futurizers
November 9: Student discussion of readings. Group learning activities.
7:30 - 9:00 Public Lecture: Can Our Legal System Survive the Future?
November 16: Student discussion of readings. Group learning activities
7:30 - 9:00 Public Lecture: Can A State Be Governed in the Future?
November 23: Thanksgiving. No class. Field Trip to be scheduled for substitute date.
November 30: Student discussion of Mid-Quarter Take-Home Essay Test (See Appendix B)
7:30 - 9:00 Public Lecture: The Universal System IS the Future.
December 7: Student presentations of final papers/projects
December 14: Student presentations of final papers/projects
Course evaluations and recommendations.

Tradition and Flexibility:

The tradition of student input and recommendations for the course have contributed to its evolution. Some developments:

1. Greater emphasis on Field Trips, group and individual. An example of a highly successful group visit is the expedition to the Minnesota Fresh Water Biological Research Foundation at Navarre on Lake Minnetonka. Joe Rosillon, Director of the Center, conducted the tour of the internationally significant facility for water research and management. Other Field Trip opportunities in the area and available to students include: Minnesota Science Museum's Market Place of Possibilities Exhibit in the Public Library in Minneapolis; Computerized Communication Centers; Criteria Architecture and Design Center; Underground Housing projects; The Big Outdoors People (Geodesic Dome distributors). The list is growing.

2. Increased emphasis on student interaction and discussion of readings, trends, conferences and other local events, and current media coverage of critical issues.

3. More time for experience with learning/thinking activities: Futures Wheel, Cross Impact Matrix, Scenario Writing, Relevance Tree, Futuribles, etc.).

4. More sharing of resources located by students; exchange of relevant information

5. Increased trend toward student involvement and service in area conferences of futuristic nature. Attention to sharing information in local calendars of events.

6. Student response to Mid-Quarter Take-Home Essay examination increasingly insightful and scholarly. Papers are read and returned with comments and suggested references for further investigation.

7. Growing collection of tapes of student presentations of final papers and projects. Many students do thoroughgoing research on a topic of particular interest or professional significance. Tapes are available to students of subsequent quarters.

8. Attendance at public sessions by ex-students and interested public is resulting in a network of informed, concerned citizens. The sessions provide a forum for the exchange and examination of issues by regular participants and proponents of Futures Studies.

Expectations:

The hope and prediction is that the course will develop and continue to attract both Metro University students and those beyond the University who are ready to participate in public forums and to share up-dated information on directions of the human family and ways of influencing personal and social futures.

Student endorsement of their experiences with Futures Studies is enthusiastic. Graduates of Metro U. whose transcript includes a competence in Futures Studies have reported job advantages.

The growing number of books and other resources, as well as the growth of the World Future Society and the local leadership of Minnesota Futurists will continue to strengthen the program.

An expression of interest in Futures Studies by Metro University President, Dr. Reatha Clark King, is helping to validate the study of the future and to stimulate expressions of interest from a growing number of staff members. Recent scheduling of a Community Faculty meeting featuring the Alvin Toffler film, Future Shock, and a follow-up panel discussion stimulated considerable interest prophetic of continued attention to the field. "Things take time."

Summary:

The nature of Futures Studies: An Overview places the instructor in the role of facilitator of learning rather than a depository of knowledge. The timely quality of the subject matter maintains a high level of stimulation and participation in students. The idea of correlating the traditionally isolated University classroom with the open marketplace is meeting with considerable public attention. Most importantly, students are reporting a change of attitude toward the future in a more positive, participative direction.

REFERENCES

1. Eiseley, Loren, The Mind As Nature, The John Dewey Society Lecture Series, New York, Harper and Row.

2. Metropolitan State University, Learning Opportunities Catalogue, St. Paul Coordinating Center, 121 Metro Square Building, St. Paul, MN. 1977-78.

3. LaConte, Ronald, Teaching Tomorrow Today, New York, Bantam Books.

Appendix A

FUTURES STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW...METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Berenice Bleedorn, Instructor...869-7083
or
647-5797
Laura Crosby, Associate.....377-2046

"THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO COPE WITH CHANGE IS TO HELP CREATE IT"..L.W.Lynett

Welcome to an experience that promises to be exciting, relevant, and unique. This is the ninth offering for the GLO-Futures Studies: An Overview. By your participation you have probably identified yourself as a potential leader in the field of Futures Studies, defined as "a dramatic, rapidly growing attempt to identify the forces for change in our society, their interactions, and their probable future courses."

Attention to this interdisciplinary study is developing world-wide and at all levels of education. In this class, the emphasis is on the process of integrating data and individual perceptions of trends and relationships dealing with crucial issues concerned with the future. Since student input is a tradition of this GLO, and since content and contacts for learning are multiplying daily, a considerable amount of flexibility of structure may be assumed.

These are the predicted requirements and bases for evaluations:

Required Reading: Toffler, Alvin, The Futurists, Random House, 1972.
Strongly Recommended: Schumacher, E. F., Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered, Harper Row, 1973.
Additional Readings and Investigations: From Bibliography on Futures Studies and other resources from libraries, periodicals, radio, television, seminars and conferences, field trips, interviews, etc. generated by students as they develop
A Journal or record of readings and observations. Each entry should be dated. The source of information should be indicated. A brief description of the learning experience and the student's personal evaluation and reaction should be entered. Notes on sessions by guest lecturers should be included.
An Essay Test (Take-Home) based on Toffler's The Futurists will be assigned as the Mid-Quarter.
A Term Paper or Project TO BE PRESENTED TO THE CLASS AT THE FINAL SESSIONS
Participation in group learning activities and discussions.

NOTES AND REMINDERS:The class meets from 6:30 to 9:30 P.M. at NSP, 414 Nicollet Mall.

1. The series of five public lectures beginning October 26 is an important component of this course. These lecture/discussion sessions are scheduled from 7:30 - 9:00 P.M. The program is listed in a separate brochure. Please feel free to invite any and all interested persons to join us during public sessions, and to participate in the discussions.
2. Competence statements will be discussed in class.
3. November 23 (Thanksgiving) class session will be rescheduled as a group Field Trip at the convenience of students.
4. If, for some reason, you are unable to attend a class, we would appreciate a call.
5. Students are invited to offer ideas and reactions as we go along. In this way we can continue the synergic style of action begun by the Metro Futures Task Force.... students, Community Faculty, and Alumni who initiated this course.

"I live on Earth at present and I don't know what I am.
I know that I am not a category. I am not a thing-a noun.I SEEM TO BE A VERB...
An evolutionary process, an integral function of the universe."....
...Buckminster Fuller

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Appendix B

FUTURES STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW--TAKE-HOME TEST

METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY..Berenice Bleedorn, Instructor

I. From the Vocabulary List (Futures Concepts and Terminology) name ten terms that are adding to your personal understanding of Futures Studies. Briefly explain how. Personalize your answer, please.

II. Using the text, The Futurists, write a brief synopsis of your reaction to the essays by:

Alvin Toffler
Margaret Mead
Kenneth Boulding
Arthur Clarke
Paul Erlich
Buckminster Fuller
John McHale
Marshall McLuhan
Arthur Waskow
Any two additional writers (Your choice)

Please include in your statement responses to these questions:

What ideas does the author have that will help you to remember him/her?

Do you see the author's viewpoint as essentially optimistic or pessimistic in terms of the future? Explain briefly.

What question would you like to ask the author if he/she were a lecturer in this series?

NOTES:

Please try to bring your test papers to class November 9 or very soon thereafter. Additional time upon request (Hardship cases only).

For information on membership and meetings of Minnesota Futurists, write:

Future Trends
c/o Earl C. Joseph M.S. U2L28
Sperry Univac, P.O. Box 3525
St. Paul, MN 55165 Tel. (612) 456-2395

For information on membership in the World Future Society, write:

The Futurist
4916 St. Elmo Ave.
Washington, D. C. 20014 USA